

Statistical Excellence Award for Early-Career Writing

The why, the what
and the how



The why

- *Significance* is a showcase for statistics
 - Challenge myths
 - Answer questions
 - Support decisions
- Written by statisticians for anyone interested in the analysis and interpretation of data

The why

- To reach a broad audience, we need:
 - Enthusiastic statisticians
 - Strong writers
 - Compelling storytellers
- To find these people, we launched the Young Statisticians Writing Competition

The what

- The competition was launched in 2011, with the first winner announced in 2012
- In 2017, it became part of the RSS Statistical Excellence Awards and was renamed the Statistical Excellence Award for Early-Career Writing
- The winning article is published in *Significance*, in print and online
- Runners-up may also be featured on the *Significance* website

The what

- What's in it for us?
 - A great piece of content from a talented young writer
- What's in it for you?
 - Exposure to our international readership of professional statisticians
 - Coverage in mainstream/science media
 - The chance to present at the RSS 2019 International Conference in Belfast, Northern Ireland

The what

- What we're looking for
 - 1,500 to 2,500 words on any subject... as long as it involves statistics and/or statistical analysis
 - An easy-to-read, magazine-style feature
 - An original article that isn't under consideration for publication elsewhere
- See significancemagazine.com/writingcomp for the full set of competition rules

The how

- How do you decide on a topic?
- **Remember: you can write about *anything***
 - The population of rats in New York City
 - Using probability distributions to plan a wedding
 - Analysing Google search data to see whether Christmas really does come earlier each year
- See more examples at significancemagazine.com/613

The how

- Ask yourself: “What’s the best way to showcase the power of statistics?”
- You might want to:
 - Bust apart a popular myth
“Are millennials really less politically engaged?” (Kevin Lin, 2017)
 - Answer a burning question
“How many cancers can we hope to prevent?”
(Stensrud and Valberg, 2018)
 - Provide evidence to support decision-making
“How many guests should I invite to my wedding to ensure a full house?”
(Damjan Vukcevic, 2013)

The how

Make sure it's a topic you're interested in,
personally and professionally

If you're not interested in
what you're writing about,
your audience will know

The how

- Tips for writing an engaging article:
 - Strong introduction, grab the reader's attention straight away
 - Make it clear why they *have* to read your article
 - Give them just a hint of what they are going to learn, or find out, if they carry on reading
 - But don't give the entire game away upfront

The how

- Think about story structure:
 - Once you've grabbed their attention with a strong introduction, draw them further into the subject
 - Start fleshing out the background and context
 - Introduce them to new ideas and concepts in a natural way – don't front-load the detail and explanation, let the story develop
 - Most important: tell the reader only what they need to know to understand your story

The how

- Accessibility is key
 - Don't get bogged down in detail
 - Don't use jargon to explain other jargon
 - Make things relevant and relatable – always use real-life examples and analogies where possible
 - Always ask yourself, “Can I make this more readable?”

Write: “Parts of the data set were pretty noisy”

Don't write: “There was evidence of considerable heteroscedasticity”

(with thanks to Robert Matthews for the example)

The how

- End your article by circling back to where you started
 - Return to the example or question or promise that was made in the introduction
 - What do we know now that we didn't know before?
 - Coming full circle helps the reader to appreciate what they have learned and how far they have come in their understanding
 - But don't just restate what the article has said, e.g.: “In this article, we have shown that...”
 - Keep the reader engaged – tell your story – right until the very end
- See bit.ly/notes4authors for more tips and advice

The how

- How do we pick a winner?
 - Our judging panel, including *Significance* editors and YSS committee members, read and debate the entries
- Judges are looking for:
 - Interesting, engaging and easy to read articles
 - A strong story, married to sound statistics and fault-free analysis

The how?

Three finalists will be selected in June,
and the winner will be announced at the
RSS Statistical Excellence Awards ceremony
in July

Best of luck in the competition